

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 512
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Voltaire and the French Enlightenment

WILL DURANT, Ph.D.



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**VOLTAIRE AND THE FRENCH
ENLIGHTENMENT.**



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VOLTAIRE AND THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT.

I. PARIS: *OEDIPE*.

At Paris in 1742 Voltaire was coaching Mlle. Dumesnil to rise to tragic heights in a rehearsal of his play *Mérope*. She complained that she would have to have "the very devil" in her to simulate such passion as he required. "That is just it," answered Voltaire; "you must have the devil in you to succeed in any of the arts."* Even his critics and his enemies admitted that he himself met this requirement perfectly. "*Il avait le diable au corps*—he had the devil in his body," said Sainte-Beuve;† and De Maistre called him the man "into whose hands hell had given all its powers."‡

Unprepossessing, ugly, vain, flippant, obscene, unscrupulous, even at times dishonest,—Voltaire was a man with the faults of his time and place, missing hardly one. And yet this same Voltaire turns out to have been tirelessly kind, considerate, lavish of his energy and his purse, as sedulous in helping friends as in crushing ene-

*Tallentyre, *Life of Voltaire*; third edition; p. 145.

†*Portraits of the Eighteenth Century*; New York, 1905; vol. i, p. 196.

‡Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*; vol. iii, p. 107.

mies, able to kill with a stroke of his pen and yet disarmed by the first advance of conciliation;—so contradictory is man.

But all these qualities, good and bad, were secondary, not of the essence of Voltaire; the astounding and basic thing in him was the inexhaustible fertility and brilliance of his mind. His works fill ninety-nine volumes, of which every page is sparkling and fruitful, though they range from subject to subject across the world as fitfully and bravely as in an encyclopedia. "My trade is to say what I think":* and what he thought was always worth saying, as what he said was always said incomparably well. If we do not read him now (though men like Anatole France have been formed to subtlety and wisdom by poring over his pages), it is because the theological battles which he fought for us no longer interest us intimately; we have passed on perhaps to other battlefields, and are more absorbed with the economics of this life than with the geography of the next; the very thoroughness of Voltaire's victory over ecclesiasticism and superstition makes dead those issues which he found alive. Much of his fame, too, came of his inimitable conversation; but *scripta manent, verba volant*—written words remain, while spoken words fly away, the winged words of Voltaire with the rest. What is left to us is too much the flesh of Voltaire, too little

*Tallentyre, p. 32.

the divine fire of his spirit. And yet, darkly as we see him through the glass of time, what a spirit!—"sheer intelligence transmuting anger into fun, fire into light";* "a creature of air and flame, the most excitable that ever lived, composed of more ethereal and more throbbing atoms than those of other men; there is none whose mental machinery is more delicate, nor whose equilibrium is at the same time more shifting and more exact."† Was he, perhaps, the greatest intellectual energy in all history?

Certainly he worked harder, and accomplished more, than any other man of his epoch. "Not to be occupied, and not to exist, amount to the same thing," he said. "All people are good except those who are idle." His secretary said that he was a miser only of his time.‡ "One must give one's self all the occupation one can to make life supportable in this world. . . . The further I advance in life, the more I find work necessary. It becomes in the long run the greatest of pleasures, and takes the place of the illusions of life."§ "If you do not want to commit suicide always have something to do."§

Suicide must have been forever tempting him, for he was ever at work. "It was because he

*J. M. Robertson, *Voltaire*; London, 1922; p. 67.

†Taine, *The Ancient Regime*; New York, 1876; p. 262.

‡Voltaire, *Romances*; New York, 1889; p. 12.

§In Sainte-Beuve, i, 226.

§Tallentyre, 93.

was so thoroughly alive that he filled the whole era with his life."* Contemporary with one of the greatest of centuries (1694-1778), he was the soul and essence of it. "To name Voltaire," said Victor Hugo, "is to characterize the entire eighteenth century."† Italy had a Renaissance, and Germany had a Reformation; but France had Voltaire; he was for his country both Renaissance and Reformation, and half the Revolution. He carried on the antiseptic scepticism of Montaigne, and the healthy earthy humor of Rabelais; he fought superstition and corruption more savagely and effectively than Luther or Erasmus, Calvin or Knox or Melanchthon; he helped to make the powder with which Mirabeau and Marat, Danton and Robespierre blew up the Old Régime. "If we judge of men by what they have done," said Lamartine, "then Voltaire is incontestably the greatest writer of modern Europe. . . . Destiny gave him eighty-three years of existence, that he might slowly decompose the decayed age; he had the time to combat time; and when he fell he was the conqueror."‡

No, never has a writer had in his lifetime such influence. Despite exile, imprisonment, and the suppression of almost every one of his books by the minions of church and state, he

*Morley, *Voltaire*; London, 1878; p. 14.

†Centenary address on Voltaire.

‡*Romances*, pp. vi and ix.

forged fiercely a path for his truth, until at last kings, popes and emperors catered to him; thrones trembled before him, and half the world listened to catch his every word. It was an age in which many things called for a destroyer. "Laughing lions must come:"* well, Voltaire came, and "annihilated with laughter."† He and Rousseau were the two voices of a vast process of economic and political transition from feudal aristocracy to the rule of the middle class. When a rising class is inconvenienced by existing law or custom it appeals from custom to reason and from law to nature—just as conflicting desires in the individual sparkle into thought. So the wealthy bourgeoisie supported the rationalism of Voltaire and the naturalism of Rousseau; it was necessary to loosen old habits and customs, to renovate and invigorate feeling and thought, to open the mind to experiment and change, before the great Revolution could come. Not that Voltaire and Rousseau were the causes of the Revolution; perhaps rather they were co-results with it of the forces that seethed and surged beneath the political and social surface of French life; they were the accompanying light and brilliance of the volcanic heat and conflagration. Philosophy is to history as reason is to desire: in either case

*Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

†Brandes, 57.

an unconscious process determines from below the conscious thought above.

Yet we must not bend back too far in attempting to correct the philosopher's tendency to exaggerate the influence of philosophy. Louis XVI, seeing in his prison Temple the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, said, "Those two men have destroyed France,"*—meaning his dynasty. "The Bourbons might have preserved themselves," said Napoleon, "if they had controlled writing materials. The advent of cannon killed the feudal system; ink will kill the modern social organization."† "Books rule the world," said Voltaire, "or at least those nations in it which have a written language; the others do not count." "Nothing enfranchises like education";—and he proceeded to enfranchise France. "When once a nation begins to think, it is impossible to stop it."‡ But with Voltaire, France began to think.

"Voltaire," that is to say, François Marie Arouet, was born at Paris in 1694, the son of a comfortably successful notary and a somewhat aristocratic mother. He owed to his father, perhaps, his shrewdness and irascibility, and to his mother something of his levity and wit. He came into the world, so to speak, by a narrow

*Tallentyre, 526.

†Bertaut, *Napoleon in His Own Words*; Chicago, 1916; p. 63.

‡Tallentyre, 101.

margin: his mother did not survive his birth; and he was so puny and sickly an infant that the nurse did not give him more than a day to live. She was slightly in error, as he lived almost to eighty-four; but all through his life his frail body tormented with illness his unconquerable spirit.

He had for his edification a model elder brother, Armand, a pious lad who fell in love with the Jansenist heresy, and courted martyrdom for his faith. "Well," said Armand to a friend who advised the better part of valor, "if you do not want to be hanged, at least do not put off other people." The father said he had two fools for his sons—one in verse and the other in prose. The fact that François made verses almost as soon as he could write his name, convinced his very practical father that nothing good would come of him. But the famous hetaira, Ninon de l'Enclos, who lived in the provincial town to which the Arouets had returned after the birth of François, saw in the youth the signs of greatness; and when she died she left him 2,000 francs for the purchase of books. His early education came from these, and from a dissolute abbé (a Jérôme Coignard in the flesh) who taught him scepticism along with his prayers. His later educators, the Jesuits, gave him the very instrument of scepticism by teaching him dialectic—the art of proving anything, and therefore at last the

habit of believing nothing. François became an adept at argument: while the boys played games in the fields, he, aged twelve, stayed behind to discuss theology with the learned. When the time came for him to earn his living, he scandalized his father by proposing to take up literature as profession. "Literature," said M. Arouet, "is the profession of the man who wishes to be useless to society and a burden to his relatives, and to die of hunger";—one can see the table trembling under his emphasis. So François went in for literature.

Not that he was a quiet and merely studious lad; he burnt the midnight oil—of others. He took to staying out late, frolicking with the wits and roisterers of the town, and experimenting with the commandments; until his exasperated father sent him off to a relative at Caen, with instructions to keep the youth practically in confinement. But his jailer fell in love with his wit, and soon gave him free rein. After imprisonment, now as later, came exile: his father sent him to the Hague with the French ambassador, requesting strict surveillance of the madcap boy; but François at once fell in love with a little lady, "Pimpette," held breathless clandestine interviews with her, and wrote to her passionate letters ending always with the refrain, "I shall certainly love you forever." The affair was discovered, and he

was sent home. He remembered Pimpette for several weeks.

In 1715, proud of his twenty-one years, he went to Paris, just in time to be in at the death of Louis XIV. The succeeding Louis being too young to govern France, much less Paris, the power fell into the hands of a regent; and during this quasi-interregnum life ran riot in the capital of the world, and young Arouet ran with it. He soon achieved a reputation as a brilliant and reckless lad. When the Regent, for economy, sold half the horses that filled the royal stables, François remarked how much more sensible it would have been to dismiss half the asses that filled the royal court. At last all the bright and naughty things whispered about Paris were fathered upon him; and it was his ill luck that these included two poems accusing the Regent of desiring to usurp the throne. The Regent raged; and meeting the youth in the park one day, said to him: "M. Arouet, I will wager that I can show you something that you have never seen before." "What is that?" "The inside of the Bastille." Arouet saw it the next day, April 16, 1717.

While in the Bastille, he adopted, for some unknown reason, the pen-name of Voltaire,* and became a poet in earnest and at length.

*Carlyle thought it an anagram for *A-r-o-u-e-t l. j. (le jeune, the younger)*. But the name seems to have occurred among the family of Voltaire's mother.

Before he had served eleven months he had written a long and not unworthy epic, the *Henriade*, telling the story of Henry of Navarre. Then the Regent, having discovered, perhaps, that he had imprisoned an innocent man, released him and gave him a pension; whereupon Voltaire wrote thanking him for so taking care of his board, and begging permission hereafter to take care of his lodging himself.*

He passed now almost with a bound from the prison to the stage. His tragedy, *Œdipe*, was produced in 1718, and broke all the records of Paris by running for forty-five consecutive nights. His old father, come to upbraid him, sat in a box, and covered his joy by grumbling, at every hit, "Oh, the rascal! the rascal!" When the poet Fontenelle met Voltaire after the play and damned it with high praise, saying it was "too brilliant for tragedy," Voltaire replied, smiling, "I must re-read your pastorals."† The youth was in no mood for caution or for courtesy; had he not put into the play itself these reckless lines?—

Our priests are not what simple folk suppose;
Their learning is but our credulity.

(Act. iv, scene 1);

and into the mouth of Araspe this epoch-making challenge?—

*Hugo, Centenary Address.

†Robertson, 67.

Let us trust but to ourselves, see all with our own eyes;
Let these be our oracles, our tripods and our gods.
(ii, 5).

The play netted Voltaire 4,000 francs, which he proceeded to invest with a wisdom unheard of in literary men; through all his tribulations he kept the art not merely of making a spacious income, but of putting it to work; he respected the classic adage that one must live before one can philosophize. In 1729 he bought up all the tickets in a poorly planned governmental lottery, and made a large sum, much to the anger of the Government. But as he became rich he became ever more generous; and a growing circle of protégés gathered about him as he passed into the afternoon of life.

It was well that he added an almost Hebraic cleverness of finance to his Gallic cleverness of pen; for his next play, *Artemire*, failed. Voltaire felt the failure keenly; every triumph sharpens the sting of later defeats. He was always painfully sensitive to public opinion, and envied the animals because they do not know what people say of them. Fate added to his dramatic failure a bad case of small-pox; he cured himself by drinking 120 pints of lemonade, and somewhat less of physic. When he came out of the shadow of death he found that his *Henriade* had made him famous; he boasted, with reason, that he had made poetry the fashion. He was received and feted everywhere;

the aristocracy caught him up and turned him into a polished man of the world, an unequalled master of conversation, and the inheritor of the finest cultural tradition in Europe.

For eight years he basked in the sunshine of the salons; and then fortune turned away. Some of the aristocracy could not forget that this young man had no other title to place and honor than that of genius, and could not quite forgive him for the distinction. During a dinner at the Duc de Sully's chateau, after Voltaire had held forth for some minutes with unabashed eloquence and wit, the Chevalier de Rohan asked, not *sotto voce*, "Who is the young man who talks so loud?" "My Lord," answered Voltaire quickly, "he is one who does not carry a great name, but wins respect for the name he has." To answer the Chevalier at all was impertinence; to answer him unanswerably was treason. The honorable Lord engaged a band of ruffians to assault Voltaire by night, merely cautioning them, "Don't hit his head; something good may come out of that yet." The next day, at the theatre, Voltaire appeared, bandaged and limping, walked up to Rohan's box, and challenged him to a duel. Then he went home and spent all day practising with the foils. But the noble Chevalier had no mind to be precipitated into heaven, or elsewhere, by a mere genius; he appealed to his cousin, who was Minister of Police, to protect him.

Voltaire was arrested, and found himself again in his old home, the Bastille, privileged once more to view the world from the inside. He was almost immediately released, on condition that he go into exile in England. He went; but after being escorted to Dover he recrossed the Channel in disguise, burning to avenge himself. Warned that he had been discovered, and was about to be arrested a third time, he took ship again, and reconciled himself to three years in England (1726-29).

II. LONDON: *THE LETTERS ON THE ENGLISH.*

He set to work with courage to master the new language. He was displeased to find that *plague* had one syllable and *ague* two; he wished that plague would take one-half the language, and ague the other half. But soon he could read English well; and within a year he was master of the best English literature of the age. He was introduced to the literati by Lord Bolingbroke, and dined with one after another of them, even with the elusive and corrosive Dean Swift. He pretended to no pedigree, and asked none of others: when Congreve spoke of his own plays as trifles, and desired to be considered rather a gentleman of leisure than an author, Voltaire said to him sharply, "If you had had the misfortune to be only a gentleman like any other, I should never have come to see you."

What surprised him was the freedom with which Bolingbroke, Pope, Addison, and Swift wrote whatever they pleased; here was a people that had opinions of its own; a people that had remade its religion, hanged its King, imported another, and built a parliament stronger than any king in Europe. There was no Bastille here, and no *lettres de cachet* by which titled pensioners or royal idlers could send their untitled foes to jail without cause and

without trial. Here were thirty religions, and not one priest. Here was the boldest sect of all, the Quakers, who astonished all Christendom by behaving like Christians. Voltaire never to the end of his life ceased to wonder at them: in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* he makes one of them say: "Our God, who has bidden us love our enemies and suffer evil without complaint, assuredly has no mind that we should cross the sea to go and cut the throats of our brothers because murderers in red clothes and hats two feet high enlist citizens by making a noise with two sticks on an ass's skin."

It was an England, too, that throbbed with a virile intellectual activity. Bacon's name was still in the air, and the inductive mode of approach was triumphing in every field. Hobbes (1588-1679) had carried out the sceptical spirit of the Renaissance, and the practical spirit of his master, into so complete and outspoken a materialism as would have won him in France the honor of martyrdom for a fallacy. Locke (1632-1704) had written a masterpiece of inductive psychological analysis (the *Essay on the Human Understanding*, 1689), without so much as mentioning the soul. Collins, Tyndal and other deists were re-affirming their faith in God while calling into question every other doctrine of the established church. Newton had just died: Voltaire attended the funeral,

and spoke repeatedly of the impression made upon him by the national honors awarded to this modest Englishman. "Not long ago," he writes, "a distinguished company were discussing the trite and frivolous question, who was the greatest man,—Caesar, Alexander, Tamerlane, or Cromwell? Some one answered that without doubt it was Isaac Newton. And rightly: for it is to him who masters our minds by the force of truth, and not to those who enslave them by violence, that we owe our reverence."* Voltaire became a patient and thorough student of Newton's works, and was later the chief protagonist of Newton's views in France.

One must marvel at the quickness with which Voltaire absorbed almost all that England had to teach him—its literature, its science, and its philosophy; he took all these varied elements, passed them through the fire of French culture and the French spirit, and transmuted them into the gold of Gallic wit and eloquence. He recorded his impressions in *Letters on the English*, which he circulated in manuscript among his friends; he did not dare to print them, for they praised "perfidious Albion" too highly to suit the taste of the royal censor. They contrasted English political liberty and intellectual independence with

**Letters on the English*, xiii; in Morley 52.

French tyranny and bondage;* they condemned the idle aristocracy and the tithe-absorbing clergy of France, with their perpetual recourse to the Bastille as the answer to every question and every doubt; they urged the middle classes to rise to their proper place in the state, as these classes had in England. Without quite knowing or intending it, these letters were the first cock's crow of the Revolution.

*Diderot was jailed six months for his *Letter on the Blind*; Buffon in 1751, was made to retract publicly his teachings on the antiquity of the earth; Freret was sent to the Bastille for a critical inquiry into the origins of the royal power in France; books continued to be burned officially by the public hangman till 1788, as also after the Restoration in 1815; in 1757 an edict pronounced the death penalty for any author who should "attack religion,"—i.e., call in question any dogma of the traditional faith.—Robertson, 73, 84, 105, 107; Pellissier, *Voltaire Philosophe*, Paris, 1908, p. 92; Buckle, *History of Civilization*, New York, 1913; Vol. I., etc.

III. CIREY: *THE ROMANCES.*

Nevertheless the Regent, not knowing of this chanticleer, sent Voltaire permission, in 1729, to return to France. For five years Voltaire enjoyed again that Parisian life whose wine flowed in his veins and whose spirit flowed from his pen. And then some miscreant of a publisher, getting hold of the *Letters on the English*, turned them, without the author's permission, into print, and sold them far and wide, to the horror of all good Frenchmen, including Voltaire. The Parliament of Paris at once ordered the book to be publicly burned as "scandalous, contrary to religion, to morals, and to respect for authority,"; and Voltaire learned that he was again on the way to the Bastille. Like a good philosopher, he took to his heels—merely utilizing the occasion to elope with another man's wife.

The Marquise du Chatelet was twenty-eight; Voltaire, alas, was already forty. She was a remarkable woman: she had studied mathematics with the redoubtable Maupertuis, and then with Clairaut; she had written a learnedly annotated translation of Newton's *Principia*; she was soon to receive higher rating than Voltaire in a contest for a prize offered by the French Academy for an essay on the physics

of fire; in short she was precisely the kind of woman who never elopes. But the Marquis was so dull, and Voltaire was so interesting—"a creature lovable in every way," she called him; "the finest ornament in France."* He returned her love with fervent admiration; called her "a great man whose only fault was being a woman"; formed from her, and from the large number of highly talented women then in France, his conviction of the native mental equality of the sexes;† and decided that her chateau at Cirey was an admirable refuge from the inclement political weather of Paris. The Marquis was away with his regiment, which had long been his avenue of escape from mathematics; and he made no objection to the new arrangements. Because of the *mariages de convenances* which forced rich old men on young women who had no taste for senility, but much hunger for romance, the morals of the day permitted a lady to add a lover to her *ménage*, if it were done with a decent respect for the hypocrisies of mankind; and if she chose not merely a lover but a genius, all the world smiled and forgave her.

In the chateau at Cirey they did not spend

*In Sainte-Beuve, i, 206.

†Tallentyre, 207. Contrast Voltaire's "God created woman only to tame mankind" (*L'Ingenu*, in *Romances*, 309), with Meredith's "Woman will be the last thing civilized by man" (*Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p. 1).

their time billing and cooing. All the day was taken up with study and research; Voltaire had an expensive laboratory fitted up for work in natural science; and for years the lovers rivaled each other in discovery and disquisition. They had many guests, but it was understood that these should entertain themselves all day long, till supper at nine. After supper, occasionally, there were private theatricals; or Voltaire would read to the guests one of his lively stories. Very soon Cirey became the Mecca of the French mind; the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie joined in the pilgrimage to taste Voltaire's wine and wit, and see him act in his own plays. He was happy to be the center of this corrupt and brilliant world; he took nothing too seriously, and for a while made "*Rire et faire rire*" his motto.* Catherine of Russia called him "the divinity of gayety." "If Nature had not made us a little frivolous," he said, "we should be most wretched. It is because one can be frivolous that the majority do not hang themselves." There was nothing of the dyspeptic Carlyle about him. "*Dulce est desipere in loco.*"† Woe to philosophers who cannot laugh away their wrinkles. I look upon solemnity as a disease."‡

It was now that he began to write those delightful romances—*Zadig*, *Candide*, *Micromégas*,

*"To laugh and to make laugh."

†"It is sweet to be foolish on occasion."

‡Letter to Frederick the Great, July 1737.

L'Ingenu, *Le Monde comme il va*, etc.—which give the Voltairean spirit in purer form than anywhere else in his ninety-nine volumes. They are not novels, but humoresque-picaresque novelettes; the heroes are not persons but ideas, the villains are superstitions, and the events are thoughts. Some are mere fragments, like *L'Ingenu*, which is Rousseau before Jean Jacques. A Huron Indian comes to France with some returning explorers; the first problem to which he gives rise is that of making him a Christian. An abbé gives him a copy of the New Testament, which the Huron likes so much that he soon offers himself not only for baptism but for circumcision as well. "For," he says, "I do not find in the book that was put into my hands a single person who was not circumcised. It is therefore evident that I must make a sacrifice to the Hebrew custom, and the sooner the better." Hardly has this difficulty been smoothed over when he has trouble over confession; he asks where in the Gospel this is commanded, and is directed to a passage in the Epistle of St. James—"Confess your sins to one another." He confesses; but "when he had done he dragged the abbé from the confessional chair, placed himself in the seat, and bade the abbé confess in turn. "Come, my friend; it is said, 'We must confess our sins to one another'; I have related my sins to you, and you shall not stir

till you recount yours." He falls in love with Miss St. Yves, but is told that he cannot marry her because she has acted as godmother at his baptism; he is very angry at this little trick of the fates, and threatens to get unbaptized. Having received permission to marry her, he is surprised to find that for marriage "notaries, priests, witnesses, contracts and dispensations are absolutely necessary. . . . 'You are then very great rogues, since so many precautions are required.'" And so, as the story passes on from incident to incident, the contradictions between primitive and ecclesiastical Christianity are forced upon the stage; one misses the impartiality of the scholar and the leniency of the philosopher; but Voltaire had begun his war against superstition, and in war we demand impartiality and leniency only of our foes.

Micromégas is an imitation of Swift, but perhaps richer than its model in cosmic imagination. The earth is visited by an inhabitant from Sirius; he is some 500,000 feet tall, as befits the citizen of so large a star. On his way through space he has picked up a gentleman from Saturn, who grieves because he is only a few thousand feet in height. As they walk through the Mediterranean the Sirian wets his heels. He asks his comrade how many senses the Saturnians have and is told: "We have seventy-two, but we are daily

complaining of the small number." "To what age do you commonly live?" "Alas, a mere trifle; . . . very few on our globe survive 15,000 years. So you see that in a manner we begin to die the very moment we are born: our existence is no more than a point, our duration an instant, and our globe an atom. Scarce do we begin to learn a little when death intervenes before we can profit by experience."* As they stand in the sea they take up a ship as one might pick up some animalcule; and the Sirian poises it on his thumb-nail, causing much commotion among the human passengers. "The chaplains of the ship repeated exorcisms, the sailors swore, and the philosophers formed a system" to explain this disturbance of the laws of gravity. The Sirian bends down like a darkening cloud and addresses them:

"O ye intelligent atoms, in whom the Supreme Being hath been pleased to manifest his omniscience and power, without doubt your joys on this earth must be pure and exquisite; for being unencumbered with matter, and—to all appearance—little else than soul, you must spend your lives in the delights of pleasure and reflection, which are the true enjoyments of a perfect spirit. True happiness I have nowhere found; but certainly here it dwells."

"We have matter enough," answered one of the philosophers, "to do abundance of mischief . . .

**Romances*, 339; cf. Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*. One of the most famous of Shaw's *bon mots* has its prototype in Voltaire's *Memnon the Philosopher*, who says, "I am afraid that our little terraqueous globe is the mad-house of those hundred thousand millions of worlds of which your lordship does me the honor to speak."—*Ibid.*, 394.

You must know, for example, that at this very moment, while I am speaking, there are 100,000 animals of our own species, covered with hats, slaying an equal number of their fellow-creatures, who wear turbans; at least they are either slaying or being slain; and this has usually been the case all over the earth from time immemorial."

"Miscreants!" cried the indignant Sirian; "I have a good mind to take two or three steps, and trample the whole nest of such ridiculous assassins under my feet."

"Don't give yourself the trouble," replied the philosopher; "they are industrious enough in securing their own destruction. At the end of ten years the hundredth part of these wretches will not survive. . . . Besides, the punishment should not be inflicted upon them, but upon those sedentary and slothful barbarians who, from their palaces, give orders for murdering a million of men, then solemnly thank God for their success."*

Next to *Candide*, which belongs to a later period of Voltaire's life, the best of these tales is *Zadig*. *Zadig* was a Babylonian philosopher, "as wise as it is possible for men to be; . . . he knew as much of metaphysics as hath ever been known in any age,—that is, little or nothing at all." Jealousy made him imagine that he was in love with Semira." In defending her against robbers he was wounded in the left eye.

A messenger was despatched to Memphis for the great Egyptian physician Hermes, who came with a numerous retinue. He visited *Zadig*, and declared that the patient would lose his eye. He even foretold the day and hour when this fatal event would happen. "Had it been the right eye," said he, "I could easily have cured it; but the wounds of the left eye are incurable." All Babylon lamented the fate of *Zadig*, and admired the profound knowledge of Hermes. In two days the

**Ibid*, 351.

abscess broke of its own accord, and Zadig was perfectly cured. Hermes wrote a book to prove that it ought not to have healed. Zadig did not read it.*

He hurried, instead, to Semira, only to find that upon hearing Hermes' first report she had betrothed herself to another man, having, she said, "an unconquerable aversion to one-eyed men." Zadig thereupon married a peasant woman, hoping to find in her the virtues which had been missing in the court lady Semira. To make sure of the fidelity of his wife, he arranged with a friend that he, Zadig, should pretend to die, and that the friend should make love to the wife an hour later. So Zadig had himself pronounced dead, and lay in the coffin while his friend first commiserated and then congratulated the widow, and at last proposed immediate marriage to her. She made a brief resistance; and then, "protesting she would ne'er consent, consented."† Zadig rose from the dead and fled into the woods to console himself with the beauty of nature.

Having become a very wise man, he was made vizier to the king, to whose realm he brought prosperity, justice, and peace. But the queen fell in love with him; and the king, perceiving it, "began to be troubled. . . . He particularly remarked that the queen's shoes were blue, and that Zadig's shoes were blue; that his

**Ibid.*, 40 f.

†Byron, *Don Juan*, i.

wife's ribbons were yellow, and that Zadig's bonnet was yellow." He resolved to poison them both; but the queen discovered the plot, and sent a note to Zadig: "Fly, I conjure thee, by our mutual love and our yellow ribbons!" Zadig again fled into the woods.

He then represented to himself the human species, as it really is, as a parcel of insects devouring one another on a little atom of clay. This true image seemed to annihilate his misfortunes, by making him sensible of the nothingness of his own being and that of Babylon. His soul launched into infinity; and detached from the senses, contemplated the immutable order of the universe. But when, afterwards, returning to himself, he considered that the Queen had perhaps died for him, the universe vanished from sight.

Passing out of Babylon he saw a man cruelly beating a woman; he responded to her cries for help, fought the man, and at last, to save himself, struck a blow which killed his enemy. Thereupon he turned to the lady and asked, "What further, madam, wouldst thou have me do for thee?" "Die, villain! for thou hast killed my lover. Oh, that I were able to tear out thy heart!"

Zadig was shortly afterward captured and enslaved; but he taught his master philosophy, and became his trusted counsellor. Through his advice the practice of suttee (by which a widow was buried with her husband) was abolished by a law which required that before such martyrdom the widow should spend an hour alone with

a handsome man. Sent on a mission to the King of Serendib, Zadig taught him that an honest minister could best be found by choosing the lightest dancer among the applicants: he had the vestibule of the dance hall filled with loose valuables, easily stolen, and arranged that each candidate should pass through the vestibule alone and unwatched; when they had all entered, they were asked to dance. "Never had dancers performed more unwillingly or with less grace. Their heads were down, their backs bent, their hands pressed to their sides."—And so the story rushes on. We can imagine those evenings at Cirey!

IV. POTSDAM AND FREDERICK.

Those who could not come to him wrote to him. In 1736 began his correspondence with Frederick, then Prince, and not yet Great. Frederick's first letter was like that of a boy to a king; its lavish flattery gives us an inkling of the reputation which Voltaire—though he had not yet written any of his masterpieces—had already won. It proclaims Voltaire as "the greatest man of France, and a mortal who does honor to language. . . . I count it one of the greatest honors of my life to be born the contemporary of a man of such distinguished attainments as yours. . . . It is not given to every one to make the mind laugh"; and "what pleasures can surpass those of the mind?"* Frederick was a free-thinker, who looked upon dogmas as a king looks upon subjects; and Voltaire had great hopes that on the throne Frederick would make the Enlightenment fashionable, while he himself, perhaps, might play Plato to Frederick's Dionysius. When Frederick demurred to the flattery with which Voltaire answered his own, Voltaire replied: "A prince who writes against flattery is as singular as a pope who writes against infallibility." Frederick sent him a copy of the *Anti-Machia-*

*In Sainte-Beuve, i, 212-215.

vel, in which the prince spoke very beautifully of the iniquity of war, and of the duty of a king to preserve peace; Voltaire wept tears of joy over this royal pacifist. A few months later Frederick, made king, invaded Silesia and plunged Europe into a generation of bloodshed.

In 1745 the poet and his mathematician went to Paris, when Voltaire became a candidate for membership in the French Academy. To achieve this quite superfluous distinction he called himself a good Catholic, complimented some powerful Jesuits, lied inexhaustibly, and in general behaved as most of us do in such cases. He failed; but a year later he succeeded, and delivered a reception address which is one of the classics of the literature of France. For a while he lingered in Paris, flitting from salon to salon, and producing play after play. From *Œdipe* at eighteen to *Irène* at eighty-three he wrote a long series of dramas, some of them failures, most of them successes. In 1730 *Brutus* failed, and in 1732 *Eriphyle* failed; his friends urged him to abandon the drama; but in the same year he produced *Zaire*, which became his greatest success. *Mahomet* followed in 1741, *Mérope* in 1743, *Semiramis* in 1748, and *Tanocrède* in 1760.

Meanwhile tragedy and comedy had entered his own life. After fifteen years, his love for Mme. du Chatelet had somewhat thinned; they had even ceased to quarrel. In 1748 the Mar-

quise fell in love with the handsome young Marquis de Saint-Lambert. When Voltaire discovered it he raged; but when Saint-Lambert asked his forgiveness he melted into a benediction. He had reached the crest of life now, and began to see death in the distance; he could not take it ill that youth should be served. "Such are women," he said philosophically (forgetting that there are such men too): "I displaced Richelieu, Saint-Lambert turns me out! That is the order of things; one nail drives out another; so goes the world."* He wrote a pretty stanza to the third nail:

Saint-Lambert, it is all for thee
The flower grows;
The rose's thorns are all for me;
For thee the rose.

Then, in 1749, came the death of Mme. du Chatelet in childbirth. It was characteristic of the age that her husband and Voltaire and Saint-Lambert should meet at her death-bed with not one word of reproach, and indeed made friends by their common loss.

Voltaire tried to forget his bereavement in work; for a time he busied himself with his *Siècle de Louis XIV*; but what rescued him from despondency was the opportune renewal of Frederick's invitation to come to his court at Potsdam. An invitation accompanied by

*In Sainte-Beuve, i, 211.

3,000 francs for traveling expenses was irresistible. Voltaire left for Berlin in 1750.

It soothed him to find himself assigned to a splendid suite in Frederick's palace, and accepted on equal terms by the most powerful monarch of the age. At first his letters were full of satisfaction: writing on July 24 to d'Argental he describes Potsdam—"150,000 soldiers; . . . opera, comedy, philosophy, poetry, grandeur and graces, grenadiers and muses, trumpets and violins, the suppers of Plato, society and liberty,—who would believe it? Yet it is very true." Years before, he had written: "*Mon Dieu!* . . . what a delightful life it would be to lodge with three or four men of letters with talents and no jealousy" (what imagination!), "to love one another, live quietly, cultivate one's art, talk of it, enlighten ourselves mutually!—I picture to myself that I shall some day live in this little Paradise."* And here it was!

Voltaire avoided the state dinners; he could not bear to be surrounded with bristling generals; he reserved himself for the private suppers to which Frederick, later in the evening, would invite a small inner circle of literary friends; for this greatest prince of his age yearned to be a poet and a philosopher. The conversation at these suppers was always in

**Ibid*, i, 193.

French; Voltaire tried to learn German, but gave it up after nearly choking: and wished the Germans had more wit and fewer consonants.* One who heard the conversation said that it was better than the most interesting and best-written book in the world. They talked about everything, and said what they thought. Frederick's wit was almost as sharp as Voltaire's; and only Voltaire dared to answer him, with that finesse which can kill without giving offense. "One thinks boldly, one is free here," wrote Voltaire joyfully. Frederick "scratches with one hand, but caresses with the other . . . I am crossed in nothing . . . I find a port after fifty years of storm. I find the protection of a king, the conversation of a philosopher, the charms of an agreeable man, united in one who for sixteen years consoled me in misfortune and sheltered me from my enemies. If one can be certain of anything it is of the character of the King of Prussia."† However . . .

In November of this same year Voltaire thought he would improve his finances by investing in Saxon bonds, despite Frederick's prohibition of such investments. The bonds rose, and Voltaire profited; but his agent, Hirsch, tried to blackmail him by threatening to publish the transaction. Voltaire "sprang at his throat and sent him sprawling." Frederick

*Brandes, *Main Currents*, i, 3.

†Tallentyre, 226, 230.

learned of the affair and fell into a royal rage. "I shall want him at the most another year," he said to La Mettrie; "one squeezes the orange and throws away the rind." La Mettrie, perhaps anxious to disperse his rivals, took care to report this to Voltaire. The suppers were resumed, "but," wrote Voltaire, "the orange rind haunts my dreams . . . The man who fell from the top of a steeple, and finding the falling through the air soft, said, 'Good, provided it lasts,' was not a little as I am."

He half desired a break; for he was as homesick as only a Frenchman can be. The decisive trifle came in 1752. Maupertuis, the great mathematician whom Frederick had imported from France with so many others in an attempt to arouse the German mind by direct contact with the "Enlightenment," quarreled with a subordinate mathematician, Koenig, over an interpretation of Newton. Frederick entered into the dispute on the side of Maupertuis; and Voltaire, who had more courage than caution, entered it on the side of Koenig. "Unluckily for me," he wrote to Mme. Denis, "I am also an author, and in the opposite camp to the King. I have no sceptre, but I have a pen." About the same time Frederick was writing to his sister: "The devil is incarnate in my men of letters; there is no doing anything with them. These fellows have no intelligence except for society. . . . It must be a consola-

tion to animals to see that people with minds are often no better than they."* It was now that Voltaire wrote against Maupertuis his famous "Diatribes of Dr. Akakia." He read it to Frederick, who laughed all night over it, but begged Voltaire not to publish it. Voltaire seemed to acquiesce; but the truth was that the thing was already sent to the printer, and the author could not bring himself to practise infanticide on the progeny of his pen. When it appeared Frederick burst into flame, and Voltaire fled from the conflagration.

At Frankfort, though in territory quite outside Frederick's jurisdiction, he was overtaken and arrested by the King's agents, and told that he could not go on until he surrendered Frederick's poem, the *Palladium*, which had not been adapted for polite society, and out-Pucelled Voltaire's *Pucelle* itself. But the terrible manuscript was in a trunk which had been lost on the way; and for weeks, till it came, Voltaire was kept almost in prison. A book-seller to whom he owed something thought it an opportune moment to come and press for the payment of his bill; Voltaire, furious, gave him a blow on the ear; whereupon Voltaire's secretary, Collini, offered comfort to the man by pointing out, "Sir, you have received a box on the ear from one of the greatest men in the world."†

*In Sainte-Beuve, i, 218.

†Morley, 146.

Freed at last, he was about to cross the frontier into France, when word came that he was exiled. The hunted old soul hardly knew where to turn; for a time he thought of going to Pennsylvania—one may imagine his desperation. He spent the March of 1754 seeking "an agreeable tomb" in the neighborhood of Geneva, safe from the rival autocrats of Paris and Berlin; at last he bought an old estate called *Les Délices*; settled down to cultivate his garden and regain his health; and when his life seemed to be ebbing away into senility, entered upon the period of his noblest and greatest work.

V. LES DELICES: THE *ESSAY ON MORALS*.

What was the cause of his new exile? That he had published in Berlin "the most ambitious, the most voluminous, the most characteristic, and the most daring of his works."* Its title was no small part of it: *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des Nations, et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII*—an *Essay on the Morals and the Spirit of the Nations from Charlemagne to Louis XIII*. He had begun it at Cirey for Mme. du Chatelet, spurred on to the task by her denunciation of history as she is writ. It is "an old almanac," she had said. "What does it matter to me, a Frenchwoman living on my estate, to know that Egil succeeded Haquin in Sweden, and that Ottoman was the son of Orto-grul? I have read with pleasure the history of the Greeks and the Romans; they offered me certain pictures which attracted me. But I have never yet been able to finish any long history of our modern nations. I can see scarcely anything in them but confusion; a host of minute events without connection or sequence, a thousand battles which settled nothing. I renounced a study which overwhelms the mind without illuminating it." Voltaire had agreed;

*Tallentyre, 291.

he had made his *Ingenu* say, "History is nothing more than a picture of crimes and misfortunes"; and he was to write to Horace Walpole (July 15, 1768): "Truly the history of the Yorkists and Lancastrians, and many others, is much like reading the history of highway robbers." But he had expressed to Mme. du Chatelet the hope that a way out might lie in applying philosophy to history, and endeavoring to trace, beneath the flux of political events, the history of the human mind.* "Only philosophers should write history," he said.† "In all nations, history is disfigured by fable, till at last philosophy comes to enlighten man; and when it does, finally arrive in the midst of this darkness, it finds the human mind so blinded by centuries of error, that it can hardly undeceive it; it finds ceremonies, facts and monuments heaped up to prove lies."‡ "History," he concludes, "is after all nothing but a pack of tricks which we play upon the dead";§ we transform the past to suit our wishes for the future, and in the upshot "history proves that anything can be proved by history."

He worked like a miner to find in this "Mississippi of falsehoods"§ the grains of truth about the real history of mankind. Year after

*Robertson, 23; Morley, 215; Tallentyre, *Voltaire in His Letters*, New York, 1919, p. 222.

†Pellissier, 213.

‡*Essai sur les Moeurs*, Introduction.

§In Morley, 220.

§Matthew Arnold's description of history.

year he gave himself to preparatory studies: a *History of Russia*, a *History of Charles XII*, *The Age of Louis XIV*, and *The Age of Louis XIII*; and through these tasks he developed in himself that unflagging intellectual conscience which enslaves a man to make a genius. "The Jesuit Père Daniel, who produced a *History of France*, had placed before him in the Royal Library of Paris 1,200 volumes of documents and manuscripts; spent an hour or so looking through them, and then, turning to Father Tournemine, the former teacher of Voltaire, dismissed the matter by declaring that all this material was 'useless old paper which he had no need of for the purpose of writing his history.'"^{*} Not so Voltaire: he read everything on his subject that he could lay his hands on; he pored over hundreds of volumes of memoirs; he wrote hundreds of letters to survivors of famous events; and even after publishing his works he continued to study, and improved every edition.

But this gathering of material was only preparatory; what was needed was a new method of selection and arrangement. Mere facts would not do—even if, as so seldom happens, they chanced to be facts. "Details that lead to nothing are to history what baggage is to an army, *impedimenta*; for we must look at things in the large, for the very reason that the human

^{*}Brandes, *Francois de Voltaire*.

mind is so small, and sinks under the weight of minutiae."* "Facts" should be collected by annalists and arranged in some kind of historical dictionary where one might find them at need, as one finds words. What Voltaire sought was a unifying principle by which the whole history of civilization in Europe could be woven on one thread; and he was convinced that this thread was the history of culture. He was resolved that his history should deal not with kings but with movements, forces, and masses; not with nations but with the human race; not with wars but with the march of the human mind. "Battles and revolutions are the smallest part of the plan; squadrons and battalions conquering or being conquered, towns taken and retaken, are common to all history. . . . Take away the arts and the progress of the mind, and you will find nothing" in any age "remarkable enough to attract the attention of posterity."†

And so he produced the first history of philosophy—the first systematic attempt to trace the streams of natural causation in the development of the European mind; it was to be expected that such an experiment should follow upon the abandonment of supernatural explanations: history could not come into its own until theology gave way. According to Buckle,

*In Morley, 275.

†Voltaire in *His Letters*, 40-41.

Voltaire's book laid the basis of modern historical science; Gibbon, Niebhur, Buckle and Grote were his grateful debtors and followers; he was the *caput Nili* of them all, and is still unsurpassed in the field which he first explored.

But why did his greatest book bring him exile? Because, by telling the truth, it offended everybody. It especially enraged the clergy by taking the view later developed by Gibbon, that the rapid conquest of paganism by Christianity had disintegrated Rome from within and prepared it to fall an easy victim to the invading and immigrating barbarians. It enraged them further by giving much less space than usual to Judea and Christendom, and by speaking of China, India and Persia, and of their faiths, with the impartiality of a Martian; in this new perspective a vast and novel world was revealed; every dogma faded into relativity; the endless East took on something of the proportions given it by geography; Europe suddenly became conscious of itself as the experimental peninsula of a continent and a culture greater than its own. How could it forgive a European for so unpatriotic a revelation? The King decreed that this Frenchman who dared to think of himself as a man first and a Frenchman afterward should never put foot upon the soil of France again.

VI. FERNEY: *CANDIDE*.

Les Délices had been a temporary home, a center from which Voltaire might prospect to find a shelter of more permanence. He found it in 1758 at Ferney, just inside the Swiss line near France; here he would be secure from the French power, and yet near to French refuge if the Swiss Government should trouble him. This last change ended his *Wanderjahre*; these fitful runnings to and fro had not been all the result of his nervous restlessness; they had reflected, too, his ubiquitous insecurity from persecution; only at sixty-four did he find a house that could be also his home. There is a passage at the end of one of his tales, "The Travels of Scarmentado," which almost applies to its author: "As I had now seen all that was rare, or beautiful on earth, I resolved for the future to see nothing but my own home; I took a wife, and soon suspected that she deceived me; but notwithstanding this doubt I still found that of all conditions of life this was much the happiest." He had no wife, but he had a niece—which is better for a man of genius. "We never hear of his wishing to be in Paris. . . . There can be no doubt that this wise exile prolonged his days."*

*Morley, 239.

He was happy in his garden, planting fruit trees which he did not expect to see flourish in his lifetime. When an admirer praised the work he had done for posterity he answered, "Yes, I have planted 4,000 trees." He had a kind word for everybody, but could be forced to sharper speech. One day he asked a visitor whence he came. "From Mr. Haller's." "He is a great man," said Voltaire; "a great poet, a great naturalist, a great philosopher, almost a universal genius." "What you say, sir, is the more admirable, as Mr. Haller does not do you the same justice." "Ah," said Voltaire, "perhaps we are both mistaken."*

Ferney now became the intellectual capital of the world; every learned man or enlightened ruler of the day paid his court either in person or by correspondence. Here came sceptical priests, liberal aristocrats, and learned ladies; here came Gibbon and Boswell from England; here came d'Alembert, Helvetius, and the other rebels of the Enlightenment; and countless others. At last the entertainment of this endless stream of visitors proved too expensive even for Voltaire; he complained that he was becoming the hotel-keeper for all Europe. To one acquaintance who announced that he had come to stay for six weeks, Voltaire said: "What is the difference between you and Don Quixote? He mistook inns for chateaux, and

*Tallentyre, 349.

you mistake this chateau for an inn." "God preserve me from my friends," he concluded; "I will take care of my enemies myself."

Add to this perpetual hospitality, the largest correspondence the world has ever seen, and the most brilliant. Letters came from all sorts and conditions of men: a burgomaster wrote from Germany asking "in confidence whether there is a God or not," and begging Voltaire to answer by return post;* Gustavus III of Sweden was elated by the thought that Voltaire sometimes glanced at the North, and told him that this was their greatest encouragement to do their best up there; Christian VII of Denmark apologized for not establishing at once all reforms; Catherine II of Russia sent him beautiful presents, wrote frequently, and hoped he would not consider her importunate. Even Frederick, after a year of doldrums, returned to the fold, and resumed his correspondence with the King of Ferney.

"You have done me great wrongs," he wrote. I have forgiven them all, and I even wish to forget them. But if you had not had to do with a madman in love with your noble genius, you would not have gotten off so well. . . . Do you want sweet things? Very well; I will tell you some truths. I esteem in you the finest genius that the ages have borne; I admire your poetry, I love your prose. . . . Never has an author before you had a tact so keen, a taste so sure and delicate. You are charming in conversation; you know how to amuse and instruct at the same time. You are

*Morley, 335.

the most seductive being that I know, capable of making yourself loved by all the world when you choose. You have such graces of mind that you can offend and yet at the same time deserve the indulgence of those who know you. In short, you would be perfect if you were not a man."*

Who would have expected so gay a host to become the exponent of pessimism? In youth, as a reveler in Paris's salons, he had seen the sunnier side of life, despite the Bastille; and yet even in those careless days he had rebelled against the unnatural optimism to which Leibnitz had given currency. To an ardent young man who had attacked him in print, and had contended with Leibnitz that this is "the best of all possible worlds," Voltaire wrote, "I am pleased to hear, sir, that you have written a little book against me. You do me too much honor. . . . When you have shown, in verse or otherwise, why so many men cut their throats in the best of all possible worlds, I shall be exceedingly obliged to you. I await your arguments, your verses, and your abuse; and assure you from the bottom of my heart that neither of us knows anything about the matter. I have the honor to be," etc.

Persecution and disillusionment had worn down his faith in life; and his experiences at Berlin and Frankfort had taken the edge from his hope. But both faith and hope suffered most when, in November, 1755, came the news

*In Sainte-Beuve, i, 221.

of the awful earthquake at Lisbon, in which 30,000 people had been killed. The quake had come on All Saints' Day; the churches had been crowded with worshippers; and death, finding its enemies in close formation, had reaped a rich harvest. Voltaire was shocked into seriousness and raged when he heard that the French clergy were explaining the disaster as a punishment for the sins of the people of Lisbon. He broke forth in a passionate poem in which he gave vigorous expression to the old dilemma: Either God can prevent evil and he will not; or he wishes to prevent it and he cannot. He was not satisfied with Spinoza's answer that *good* and *evil* are human terms, inapplicable to the universe, and that our tragedies are trivial things in the perspective of eternity.

I am a puny part of the great whole.
Yes; but all animals condemned to live,
All sentient things, born by the same stern law,
Suffer like me, and like me also die.
The vulture fastens on his timid prey,
And stabs with bloody beak the quivering limbs:
All's well, it seems, for it. But in a while
An eagle tears the vulture into shreds;
The eagle is transfixed by shafts of man;
The man, prone in the dust of battlefields,
Mingling his blood with dying fellow men,
Becomes in turn the food of ravenous birds.
Thus the whole world in every member groans:
All born for torment and for mutual death.
And o'er this ghastly chaos you would say
The ill of each make up the good of all!
What blessedness! And as, with quaking voice,
Mortal and pitiful ye cry, "All's well."
The universe belies you, and your heart
Refutes a hundred times your mind's conceit. . . .

What is the verdict of the vastest mind?
 Silence: the book of fate is closed to us.
 Man is a stranger to his own research;
 He knows not whence he comes, nor whither goes.
 Tormented atoms in a bed of mud,
 Devoured by death, a mockery of fate;
 But thinking atoms, whose far-seeing eyes,
 Guided by thought, have measured the faint stars.
 Our being mingles with the infinite;
 Ourselves we never see, or come to know.
 This world, this theatre of pride and wrong,
 Swarms with sick fools who talk of happiness. . .
 Once did I sing, in less lugubrious tone,
 The sunny ways of pleasure's genial rule;
 The times have changed, and, taught by growing
 age,
 And sharing of the frailty of mankind,
 Seeking a light amid the deepening gloom,
 I can but suffer, and will not repine.*

A few months later the Seven Years' War broke out; Voltaire looked upon it as madness and suicide, the devastation of Europe to settle whether England or France should win "a few acres of snow" in Canada. On the top of this came a public reply, by Jean Jacques Rousseau, to the poem on Lisbon. Man himself was to be blamed for the disaster, said Rousseau; if we lived out in the fields, and not in the towns, we should not be killed on so large a scale; if we lived under the sky, and not in houses, houses would not fall upon us. Voltaire was amazed at the popularity won by this profound theodicy; and angry that his name should be dragged into the dust by such a Quixote, he turned upon Rousseau "that most terrible of all

**Selected Works of Voltaire*; London, 1911; pp. 3-5.

the intellectual weapons ever wielded by man, the mockery of Voltaire."* In three days, in 1751, he wrote *Candide*.

Never was pessimism so gaily argued; never was man made to laugh so heartily while learning that this is a world of woe. And seldom has a story been told with such simple and hidden art; it is pure narrative and dialogue; no descriptions pad it out; and the action is riotously rapid. "In Voltaire's fingers," says Anatole France, "the pen runs and laughs."† It is perhaps the finest short story in all literature.

Candide, as his name indicates, is a simple and honest lad, son of the great Baron of Thunder-Ten-Trockh of Westphalia, and pupil of the learned Pangloss.

Pangloss was professor of metaphysicotheologicocosmonigology. . . . "It is demonstrable," said he, "that all is necessarily for the best end. Observe that the nose has been formed to bear spectacles . . . legs were visibly designed for stockings . . . stones were designed to construct castles . . . pigs were made so that we might have pork all the year round. Consequently, they who assert that all is well have said a foolish thing; they should have said all is for the best."

While Pangloss is discoursing, the castle is attacked by the Bulgarian army, and *Candide* is captured and turned into a soldier.

*Tallentyre, 231.

†Intro. to *Candide*, Modern Library edition.

He was made to wheel about to the right and to the left, to draw his rammer, to return his rammer, to present, to fire, to march. . . . He resolved, one fine day in spring, to go for a walk, marching straight before him, believing that it was a privilege of the human as well as the animal species to make use of their legs as they pleased. He had advanced two leagues when he was overtaken by four heroes six feet tall, who bound him and carried him to a dungeon. He was asked which he would like the best, to be whipped six and thirty times through all the regiment, or to receive at once two balls of lead in his brain. He vainly said that human will is free, and that he chose neither the one nor the other. He was forced to make a choice; he determined, in virtue of that gift of God called liberty, to run the gauntlet six-and-thirty times. He bore this twice.*

Candide escapes, takes passage to Lisbon, and on board ship meets Prof. Pangloss, who tells how the Baron and Baroness were murdered and the castle destroyed. "All this," he concludes, "was indispensable; for private misfortunes make the general good, so that the more private misfortunes there are, the greater is the general good." They arrive in Lisbon just in time to be caught in the earthquake. After it is over they tell each other their adventures and sufferings; whereupon an old servant assures them that their misfortunes are as nothing compared with her own. "A hundred times I was on the point of killing myself, but I loved life. This ridiculous foible is perhaps one of our most fatal characteristics; for is there anything more absurd than to wish to carry continually a burden which one can always throw down?"

**Candide*, p. 7.

Or, as another character expresses it, "All things considered, the life of a gondolier is preferable to that of a doge; but I believe the difference is so trifling that it is not worth the trouble of examining."

Candide, fleeing from the Inquisition, goes to Paraguay; "there the Jesuit Fathers possess all, and the people nothing; it is a masterpiece of reason and justice." In a Dutch colony he comes upon a negro with one hand, one leg, and a rag for clothing. "When we work at the sugar canes," the slave explains, "and the mill snatches hold of a finger, they cut off a hand; and when we try to run away, they cut off a leg. . . . This is the price at which you eat sugar in Europe." Candide finds much loose gold in the unexplored interior; he returns to the coast and hires a vessel to take him to France; but the skipper sails off with the gold and leaves Candide philosophizing on the wharf. With what little remains to him, Candide purchases a passage on a ship bound for Bordeaux; and on board strikes up a conversation with an old sage, Martin.

"Do you believe," said Candide, "that men have always massacred one another as they do today, that they have always been liars, cheats, traitors, ingrates, brigands, idiots, thieves, scoundrels, gluttons, drunkards, misers, envious, ambitious, bloody-minded, calumniators, debauchees, fanatics, hypocrites and fools?"

"Do you believe," said Martin, "that hawks have always eaten pigeons when they have found them?"

"Without doubt," said Candide.

"Well, then," said Martin, "if hawks have always had the same character, why should you imagine that men may have changed theirs?"

"Oh!" said Candide, "there is a vast deal of difference, for free will—"

And reasoning thus they arrived at Bordeaux.*

We cannot follow Candide through the rest of his adventures, which form a rollicking commentary on the difficulties of medieval theology and Leibnitzian optimism. After suffering a variety of evils among a variety of men, Candide settles down as a farmer in Turkey; and the story ends with a final dialogue between master and pupil:

Pangloss sometimes said to Candide:

"There is a concatenation of events in this best of all possible worlds: for if you had not been kicked out of a magnificent castle; . . . if you had not been put into the Inquisition; if you had not walked over America; . . . if you had not lost all your gold; . . . you would not be here eating preserved citrons and pistachio-nuts."

"All that is very well," answered Candide; "but let us cultivate our garden."

*P. 104.

VII. THE *ENCYCLOPEDIA* AND THE *PHILOSOPHIC DICTIONARY*.

The popularity of so irreverent a book as *Candide* gives us some sense of the spirit of the age. The lordly culture of Louis XIV's time, despite the massive bishops who spoke so eloquent a part in it, had learned to smile at dogma and tradition. The failure of the Reformation to capture France had left for Frenchmen no half-way house between infallibility and infidelity; and while the intellect of Germany and England moved leisurely in the lines of religious evolution, the mind of France jumped precipitately from the hot faith which massacred the Huguenots to the cold hostility with which La Mettrie, Helvetius, Holbach and Diderot turned upon the religion of their fathers. Let us look for a moment at the intellectual environment in which the later Voltaire moved and had his being.

La Mettrie (1709-51) was an army physician who had lost his post by writing a *Natural History of the Soul*, and had won exile by a work called *Man a Machine*. He had taken refuge at the court of Frederick, who was himself something of an advanced thinker and was resolved to have the very latest culture from Paris. La Mettrie took up the idea of mechanism where

the frightened Descartes, like a boy who has burned his fingers, had dropped it; and announced boldly that all the world, not excepting man, was a machine. The soul is material, and matter is soulful; but whatever they are they act upon each other, and grow and decay with each other in a way that leaves no doubt of their essential similarity and interdependence. If the soul is pure spirit, how can enthusiasm warm the body, or fever in the body disturb the processes of the mind? All organisms have evolved out of one original germ, through the reciprocal action of organism and environment. The reason why animals have intelligence, and plants none, is that animals move about for their food, while plants take what comes to them. Man has the highest intelligence because he has the greatest wants and the widest mobility; "beings without wants are also without mind."

Though La Mettrie was exiled for these opinions, Helvetius (1715-71), who took them as the basis of his book *On Man*, became one of the richest men in France, and rose to position and honor. Here we have the ethic, as in La Mettrie the metaphysic, of atheism. All action is dictated by egoism, self-love; "even the hero follows the feeling which for him is associated with the greatest pleasure"; and "virtue is egoism furnished with a spy-glass."* Conscience

*Taine, *The Ancient Regime*.

is not the voice of God, but the fear of the police; it is the deposit left in us by the stream of prohibitions poured over the growing soul by parents and teachers and press. Morality must be founded not on theology but on sociology; the changing needs of society, and not any unchanging revelation or dogma, must determine the good.

The greatest figure in this group was Denis Diderot (1713-84). His ideas were expressed in various fragments from his own pen, and in the *System of Nature* of Baron d'Holbach (1723-89), whose salon was the center of Diderot's circle. "If we go back to the beginning," says Holbach, "we shall find that ignorance and fear created the gods; that fancy, enthusiasm or deceit adorned or disfigured them; that weakness worships them; that credulity preserves them; and that custom respects and tyranny supports them in order to make the blindness of men serve its own interests." Belief in God, said Diderot, is bound up with submission to autocracy; the two rise and fall together; and "men will never be free till the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest." The earth will come into its own only when heaven is destroyed. Materialism may be an over-simplification of the world—all matter is probably instinct with life, and it is impossible to reduce the unity of consciousness to matter and motion; but materialism is a good weapon against

the Church, and must be used till a better one is found. Meanwhile one must spread knowledge and encourage industry; industry will make for peace, and knowledge will make a new and natural morality.

These are the ideas which Diderot and d'Alembert labored to disseminate through the great *Encyclopédie* which they issued, volume by volume, from 1752 to 1772. The Church had the first volumes suppressed; and as the opposition increased, Diderot's comrades abandoned him; but he worked on angrily, invigorated by his rage. "I know nothing so indecent," he said, "as these vague declamations of the theologians against reason. To hear them one would suppose that men could not enter into the bosom of Christianity except as a herd of cattle enters a stable." It was, as Paine put it, the age of reason; these men never doubted that the intellect was the ultimate human test of all truth and all good. Let reason be freed, they said, and it would in a few generations build Utopia. Diderot did not suspect that the erotic and neurotic Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), whom he had just introduced to Paris, was carrying in his head, or in his heart, the seeds of a revolution against this enthronement of reason; a revolution which, armed with the impressive obscurities of Immanuel Kant, would soon capture every citadel of philosophy.

Naturally enough, Voltaire, who was inter-

ested in everything, and had a hand in every fight, was caught up for a time in the circle of the Encyclopedists; they were glad to call him their leader; and he was not averse to their incense, though he thought some of their ideas needed a little pruning. They asked him to write articles for their great undertaking, and he responded with a facility and fertility which delighted them. When he had finished this work he set about making an encyclopedia of his own, which he called a *Philosophic Dictionary*; with unprecedented audacity he took subject after subject as the alphabet suggested them, and poured out under each heading part of his inexhaustible resources of knowledge and wisdom. Imagine a man writing on everything, and producing a classic none the less; the most readable and sparkling of Voltaire's works aside from his romances; every article a model of brevity, clarity, and wit. "Some men can be prolix in one small volume; Voltaire is terse through a hundred."* Here at last Voltaire proves that he is a philosopher.

He begins, like Bacon, Descartes and Locke and all the moderns, with doubt and a (supposedly) clean slate. "I have taken as my patron saint St. Thomas of Didymus, who always insisted on an examination with his own hands."† He thanks Bayle for having taught

*Robertson, 87.

†*Philosophic Dictionary*, New York, 1901; vol. ix, p. 193.

him the art of doubt. He rejects all systems, and suspects that "every chief of a sect in philosophy has been a little of a quack."* "The further I go, the more I am confirmed in the idea that systems of metaphysics are for philosophers that novels are for women."† "It is only charlatans who are certain. We know nothing of first principles. It is truly extravagant to define God, angels, minds, and to know precisely why God formed the world, when we do not know why we move our arms at will. Doubt is not a very agreeable state, but certainty is a ridiculous one."‡ "I do not know how I was made, and how I was born. I did not know at all, during a quarter of my life, the causes of what I saw, or heard, or felt. . . . I have seen that which is called matter, both as the star Sirius, and as the smallest atom which can be perceived with the microscope; and I do not know what this matter is."‡

He tells a story of "The Good Brahmin," who says, "I wish I had never been born!"

"Why so?" said I.

"Because," he replied, "I have been studying these forty years, and I find that it has been so much time lost. . . . I believe that I am composed of matter, but I have never been able to satisfy myself what it is that produces thought. I am even ignorant whether my understanding is a simple faculty like that of walking or digesting, or if I think with my head in the same manner as

**Ibid.*, 42.

†In Pellissier, 11, note.

‡Robertson, 122.

‡*Dictionary*, article "Ignorance."

I take hold of a thing with my hands I talk a great deal, and when I have done speaking I remain confounded and ashamed of what I have said."

The same day I had a conversation with an old woman, his neighbor. I asked her if she had ever been unhappy for not understanding how her soul was made? She did not even comprehend my question. She had not, for the briefest moment in her life, had a thought about these subjects with which the good Brahmin had so tormented himself. She believed in the bottom of her heart in the metamorphoses of Vishnu, and provided she could get some of the sacred water of the Ganges in which to make her ablutions, she thought herself the happiest of women. Struck with the happiness of this poor creature, I returned to my philosopher, whom I thus addressed:

"Are you not ashamed to be thus miserable when, not fifty yards from you, there is an old automaton who thinks of nothing and lives contented?"

"You are right," he replied. "I have said to myself a thousand times that I should be happy if I were but as ignorant as my old neighbor; and yet it is a happiness which I do not desire."

This reply of the Brahmin made a greater impression on me than anything that had passed.*

Even if Philosophy should end in total doubt and Montaigne's "*Que sais-je?*"† it is man's greatest adventure, and his noblest. Let us learn to be content with modest advances in knowledge, rather than be forever weaving new systems out of our mendacious imagination.

We must not say, Let us begin by inventing principles whereby we may be able to explain everything; rather we must say, Let us make an exact analysis of the matter, and then we shall try to see, with much diffidence, if it fits in with any

**Romances*, 450 f.

† "What do I know?"

principle.* The Chancellor Bacon had shown the road which science might follow But then Descartes appeared and did just the contrary of what he should have done: instead of studying nature, he wished to divine her This best of mathematicians made only romances in philosophy† It is given us to calculate, to weigh, to measure, to observe; this is natural philosophy; almost all the rest is chimera.‡

*In Pellissier, 28, note.

†*Voltaire's Prose*, ed. Cohn and Woodward; Boston, 1918; p. 54.

‡In Pellissier, 29-30.

VIII. *ECRASEZ L'INFAME.*

Under ordinary circumstances it is probable that Voltaire would never have passed out of the philosophic calm of this courteous scepticism to the arduous controversies of his later years. The aristocratic circles in which he moved agreed so readily with his point of view that there was no incentive to polemics; even the priests smiled with him over the difficulties of the faith, and cardinals considered whether, after all, they might not yet make him into a good Capuchin. What were the events that turned him from the polite persiflage of agnosticism to a bitter anti-clericalism which admitted no compromise, but waged relentless war to "crush the infamy" of ecclesiasticism?

Not far from Ferney lay Toulouse, the seventh city of France. In Voltaire's day the Catholic clergy enjoyed absolute sovereignty there; the city commemorated with frescoes the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (an edict which had given freedom of worship to Protestants), and celebrated as a great feast the day of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. No Protestant in Toulouse could be a lawyer, or a physician, or an apothecary, or a grocer, or a book-seller, or a printer; nor could a Catholic

keep a Protestant servant or clerk—in 1748 a woman had been fined 3,000 francs (an impressive sum in those days) for using a Protestant midwife.

Now it happened that Jean Calas, a Protestant of Toulouse, had a daughter who became a Catholic, and a son who hanged himself, presumably because of disappointment in business. There was a law in Toulouse that every suicide should be placed naked on a hurdle, with face down, drawn thus through the streets, and then hanged on a gibbet. The father, to avert this, asked his relatives and his friends to testify to a natural death. In consequence, rumor began to talk of murder, and to hint that the father had killed the son to prevent his imminent conversion to Catholicism. Calas was arrested, put to the torture, and died soon after (1761). His family, ruined and hunted, fled to Ferney, and sought the aid of Voltaire. He took them into his home, comforted them, and marveled at the story of medieval persecution which they told.

About the same time (1762) came the death of Elizabeth Sirvens; again rumor charged that she had been pushed into a well just as she was about to announce her conversion to Catholicism. That a timid minority of Protestants would hardly dare to behave in this way was a rational consideration, and therefore out of the purview of rumor.—In 1765 a young man

by the name of La Barre, aged sixteen, was arrested on the charge of having mutilated crucifixes. Subjected to torture, he confessed his guilt; his head was cut off, and his body was flung into the flames, while the crowd applauded. A copy of Voltaire's *Philosophic Dictionary*, which had been found on the lad, was burned with him.

For almost the first time in his life, Voltaire became a thoroughly serious man. When d'Alembert, disgusted equally with state, church and people, wrote that hereafter he would merely mock at everything, Voltaire answered, "This is not a time for jesting; wit does not harmonize with massacres. . . . Is this the country of philosophy and pleasure? It is rather the country of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew." It was with Voltaire now as with Zola and Anatole France in the case of Dreyfus; this tyrannous injustice lifted him up; he ceased to be merely a man of letters, became a man of action, too; he laid aside philosophy for war, or rather turned his philosophy into relentless dynamite. "During this time not a smile escaped me without my reproaching myself for it as for a crime." It was now that he adopted his famous motto, *Ecrasez l'infame*, and stirred the soul of France against the abuses of the church. He began to pour forth such intellectual fire and brimstone as melted mitres and sceptres, broke the power of the priesthood in

France, and helped to overthrow a throne. He sent out a call to his friends and followers, summoning them to battle: "Come, brave Diderot, intrepid d'Alembert, ally yourselves; . . . overwhelm the fanatics and the knaves, destroy the insipid declamations, the miserable sophistries, the lying history, . . . the absurdities without number; do not let those who have sense be subjected to those who have none; and the generation which is being born will owe to us its reason and its liberty."*

Just at this crisis an effort was made to buy him off; through Mme. de Pompadour he received an offer of a cardinal's hat as the reward of reconciliation with the Church.† As if the rule of a few tongue-tied bishops could interest a man who was the undisputed sovereign of the world of intellect! Voltaire refused; and like another Cato, began to end all his letters with "Crush the infamy." He sent out his *Treatise on Toleration*: he said he would have borne with the absurdities of dogma had the clergy lived up to their sermons and had they tolerated differences; but "subtleties of which not a trace can be found in the Gospels are the source of the bloody quarrels of Christian history."‡ "The man who says to me, 'Believe as I do, or God will damn you,' will presently say, 'Believe

*Correspondence, Nov. 11, 1765.

†Tallentyre, 319; questioned by some.

‡Selected Works, p. 62.

as I do, or I shall assassinate you.' ”* “By what right could a being created free force another to think like himself?”† “A fanaticism composed of superstition and ignorance has been the sickness of all the centuries.”‡ No such perpetual peace as the Abbé de St.-Pierre had pleaded for could ever be realized unless men learned to tolerate one another's philosophic, political and religious differences. The very first step towards social health was the destruction of the ecclesiastical power in which intolerance had its root.

The *Treatise on Toleration* was followed up with a Niagara of pamphlets, histories, dialogues, letters, catechisms, diatribes, squibs, sermons, verses, tales, fables, commentaries and essays, under Voltaire's own name and under a hundred pseudonyms—“the most astonishing pell-mell of propaganda ever put out by one man.”‡ Never was philosophy phrased so clearly, and with such life; Voltaire writes so well that one does not realize that he is writing philosophy. He said of himself, over-modestly, “I express myself clearly enough: I am like the little brooks, which are transparent because they are not deep.”|| And so he was read; soon everybody, even the clergy, had his pam-

**Ibid.*, 65.

†*Essai sur les Moeurs*; Prose Works, p. 14.

‡*Ibid.*, p. 26.

§Robertson, 112.

||In Sainte-Beuve, ii, 146.

phlets; of some of them 300,000 copies were sold, though readers were far fewer then than now; nothing like it had ever been seen in the history of literature. "Big books," he said, "are out of fashion." And so he sent forth his little soldiers, week after week, month after month, resolute and tireless, surprising the world with the fertility of his thought and the magnificent energy of his seventy years. As Helvetius put it. Voltaire had crossed the Rubicon, and stood before Rome.*

He began with a "higher criticism" of the authenticity and reliability of the Bible; he takes much of his material from Spinoza, more of it from the English Deists, most of it from the *Critical Dictionary* of Bayle (1647-1706); but how brilliant and fiery their material becomes in his hands! One pamphlet is called "The Questions of Zapata," a candidate for the priesthood; Zapata asks, innocently, "How shall we proceed to show that the Jews, whom we burn by the hundred, were for four thousand years the chosen people of God?"†—and he goes on with questions which lay bare the inconsistencies of narrative and chronology in the Old Testament. "When two Councils anathematize each other, as has often happened, which of them is infallible?" At last, "Zapata, receiving

*In Pellissier, 101.

†Selected Works, p. 26. Voltaire himself was something of an anti-Semite, chiefly because of his not quite admirable dealings with the financiers.

no answer, took to preaching God in all simplicity. He announced to men the common Father, the rewarder, punisher, and pardoner. He extricated the truth from the lies, and separated religion from fanaticism; he taught and practised virtue. He was gentle, kindly, and modest; and he was burned at Valladolid in the year of grace 1631.”*

Under the article on “Prophecy” in the *Philosophic Dictionary*, he quotes Rabbin Isaac’s *Bulwark of Faith* against the application of Hebrew prophecies to Jesus, and then goes on, ironically: “Thus these blind interpreters of their own religion and their own language, combated with the Church, and obstinately maintained that this prophecy cannot in any manner regard Jesus Christ.”† Those were dangerous days, in which one was compelled to say what one meant without saying it, and the shortest line to one’s purpose was anything but straight. Voltaire likes to trace Christian dogmas and rites to Greece, Egypt and India, and thinks that these adaptations were not the least cause of the success of Christianity in the ancient world. Under the article on “Religion” he asks, slyly, “After our own holy religion, which doubtless is the only good one, what religion would be the least objectionable?”—and he proceeds to describe a faith and worship directly opposed to

**Ibid.*, 26-35.

†IX, 21.

the Catholicism of his day. "Christianity must be divine," he says, in one of his most unmeasured sallies, "since it has lasted 1,700 years despite the fact that it is so full of villainy and nonsense."* He shows how almost all ancient peoples had similar myths, and hastily concludes that the myths are thereby proved to have been the inventions of priests: "the first divine was the first rogue who met the first fool." However, it is not religion itself which he attributes to the priests, but theology. It is slight differences in theology that have caused so many bitter disputes and religious wars. "It is not the ordinary people . . . who have raised these ridiculous and fatal quarrels, the sources of so many horrors. . . . Men fed by your labors in a comfortable idleness, enriched by your sweat and your misery, struggled for partisans and slaves; they inspired you with a destructive fanaticism, that they might be your masters; they made you superstitious not that you might fear God but that you might fear them."†

Let it not be supposed from all this that Voltaire was quite without religion. He decisively rejects atheism;‡ so much so that some of the Encyclopedists turned against him, saying, "Voltaire is a bigot, he believes in God." In "The

* *Essai sur les Mœurs*, part ii, ch 9; in Morley 322.

† *Selected Works*, 63.

‡ Cf. *The Sage and the Atheist*, chs. 9 and 10.

"Ignorant Philosopher" he reasons towards Spinozist pantheism, but then recoils from it as almost atheism. He writes to Diderot:

I confess that I am not at all of the opinion of Saunderson, who denies a God because he was born sightless. I am, perhaps, mistaken; but in his place I should recognize a great Intelligence who had given me so many substitutes for sight; and perceiving, on reflection, the wonderful relations between all things, I should have suspected a Workman infinitely able. If it is very presumptuous to divine *what* He is, and *why* He has made everything that exists, so it seems to me very presumptuous to deny *that* He exists. I am exceedingly anxious to meet and talk with you, whether you think yourself one of His works, or a particle drawn, of necessity, from eternal and necessary matter. Whatever you are, you are a worthy part of that great whole which I do not understand.*

To Holbach he points out that the very title of his book, the *System of Nature*, indicates a divine organizing intelligence. On the other hand he stoutly denies miracles and the supernatural efficacy of prayer:

I was at the gate of the convent when Sister Fessue said to Sister Confite: "Providence takes a visible care of me; you know how I love my sparrow; he would have been dead if I had not said nine Ave-Marias to obtain his cure." . . . A metaphysician said to her: "Sister, there is nothing so good as Ave-Marias, especially when a girl pronounces them in Latin in the suburbs of Paris; but I cannot believe that God has occupied himself so much with your sparrow, pretty as it is; I pray you to believe that he has other things to attend to. . . ." Sister Fessue: "Sir, this discourse savors of heresy. My confessor . . . will infer that you do not believe in Providence." Metaphysician: "I believe in a general Providence, dear Sister, which

*Voltaire in *His Letters*, p. 81.

has laid down from all eternity the law which governs all things, like light from the sun; but I believe not that a particular Providence changes the economy of the world for your sparrow."* His Sacred Majesty, Chance, decides everything.†

True prayer lies not in asking for a violation of natural law but in the acceptance of natural law as the unchangeable will of God‡

Similarly, he denies free will‡ As to the soul he is an agnostic: "Four thousand volumes of metaphysics will not teach us what the soul is."§ Being an old man, he would like to believe in immortality, but he finds it difficult.

Nobody thinks of giving an immortal soul to the flea; why then to an elephant, or a monkey, or my valet?|| . . . A child dies in its mother's womb, just at the moment when it has received a soul. Will it rise again foetus, or boy, or man? To rise again—to be the same person that you were—you must have your memory perfectly fresh and present; for it is memory that makes your identity. If your memory be lost, how will you be the same man?*** . . . Why do mankind flatter themselves that they alone are gifted with a spiritual and immortal principle? . . . Perhaps from their inordinate vanity. I am persuaded that if a peacock could speak he would boast of his soul, and would affirm that it inhabited his magnificent tail.***

And in this earlier mood he rejects also the view that belief in immortality is necessary for

**Dictionary*, art. "Providence."

†Correspondence, Feb. 26, 1767.

‡*Romances*, p. 412.

§*The Ignorant Philosopher*.

||*Dictionary*, art. "Soul."

‖In Morley, ed. 1886; p. 286.

***Dictionary*, art. "Resurrection."

****Romances*, p. 411.

morality: the ancient Hebrews were without it, just when they were the "chosen people"; and Spinoza was a paragon of morality.

In later days he changed his mind. He came to feel that belief in God has little moral value unless accompanied by belief in an immortality of punishment and reward. Perhaps, "for the common people (*la canaille*) a rewarding and avenging God" is necessary. Bayle had asked, If a society of atheists could subsist?—Voltaire answers, "Yes, if they are also philosophers."* But men are seldom philosophers; "if there is a hamlet, to be good it must have a religion."† "I want my lawyer, my tailor, and my wife to believe in God," says "A" in "A, B, C"; "so, I imagine, I shall be less robbed and less deceived." "If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him."‡ "I begin to put more store on happiness and life than on truth";§—a remarkable anticipation, in the midst of the Enlightenment, of the very doctrine with which Immanuel Kant was later to combat the Enlightenment. He defends himself gently against his friends the atheists; he addresses Holbach in the article on "God" in the *Dictionary*:

You yourself say that belief in God . . . has kept some men from crime; this alone suffices me. When

*In Pellissier, 169.

†*Dictionary*, art. "Religion."

‡In Pellissier, 172.

§Correspondence, Sept. 11, 1738.

this belief prevents even ten assassinations, ten calumnies, I hold that all the world should embrace it. Religion, you say, has produced countless misfortunes; say rather the superstition which reigns on our unhappy globe. This is the cruelest enemy of the pure worship due to the Supreme Being. Let us detest this monster which has always torn the bosom of its mother; those who combat it are the benefactors of the human race; it is a serpent which chokes religion in its embrace; we must crush its head without wounding the mother whom it devours."

This distinction between superstition and religion is fundamental with him. He accepts gladly the theology of the Sermon on the Mount, and acclaims Jesus in tributes which could hardly be matched even with the pages of saintly ecstasy. He pictures Christ among the sages, weeping over the crimes that have been committed in his name. His profession of faith in God seems to have been sincere; we see a reference to himself when he makes an Athenian say of Socrates, "Yes, that is the sage who has no religion; that is the atheist who says there is only one God."* At last he built his own church, with the dedication, "Deo erexit Voltaire"; the only church in Europe, he said, that was erected to God. He addresses to God a magnificent prayer; and in the article "Theist" he expounds his faith finally and clearly:

The theist is a man firmly persuaded of the existence of a supreme being as good as he is powerful, who has formed all things . . . ; who punishes,

**Dictionary*, art. "Socrates."

without cruelty, all crimes, and recompenses with goodness all virtuous actions . . . Reunited in this principle with the rest of the universe, he does not join any of the sects which all contradict one another. His religion is the most ancient and the most widespread; for the simple worship of a God preceded all the systems of the world. He speaks a language which all peoples understand, while they do not understand one another. He has brothers from Pekin to Cayenne, and he counts all the sages for his fellows. He believes that religion consists neither in the opinions of an unintelligible metaphysic, nor in vain shows, but in worship and in justice. To do good is his worship, to submit to God is his creed. The Mohammedan cries out to him, "Beware if you fail to make the pilgrimage to Mecca!"—the priest says to him, "Curses on you if you do not make the trip to Notre Dame de Lorette!" He laughs at Lorette and at Mecca; but he succors the indigent and defends the oppressed.

IX. VOLTAIRE AND ROUSSEAU.

Voltaire was so engrossed in the struggle against ecclesiastical tyranny that during the later decades of his life he was compelled almost to withdraw from the war on political corruption and oppression. "Politics is not in my line: I have always confined myself to doing my little best to make men less foolish and more honorable." He knew how complex a matter political philosophy can become, and he shed his certainties as he grew. "I am tired of all these people who govern states from the recesses of their garrets";* "these legislators who rule the world at two cents a sheet; . . . unable to govern their wives or their households they take great pleasure in regulating the universe."† It is impossible to settle these matters with simple and general formulæ, or by dividing all people into fools and knaves on the one hand, and on the other, ourselves. "Truth has not the name of a party"; and he writes to Vauvenargues: "It is the duty of a man like you to have preferences, but not exclusions."‡

Being rich, he inclines towards conservatism,

*Correspondence, Sept. 18, 1763.

†In Pellissier, 237, note, and 236.

‡Pellissier, 23; Morley, 86.

for no worse reason than that which impels the hungry man to call for a change. His panacea is the spread of property: ownership gives personality and an uplifting pride. "The spirit of property doubles a man's strength. It is certain that the possessor of an estate will cultivate his own inheritance better than that of another."*

He refuses to excite himself about forms of government. Theoretically he prefers a republic, but he knows its flaws: it permits factions which, if they do not bring on civil war, at least destroy national unity; it is suited only to small states protected by geographical situation, and as yet unspoiled and untorn with wealth; in general "men are rarely worthy to govern themselves." Republics are transient at best; they are the first form of society, arising from the union of families; the American Indians lived in tribal republics, and Africa is full of such democracies. But differentiation of economic status puts an end to these egalitarian governments; and differentiation is the inevitable accompaniment of development. "Which is better," he asks, "a monarchy or a republic?"—and he replies: "For four thousand years this question has been tossed about. Ask the rich for an answer—they all want aristocracy. Ask the people—they want democracy. Only the monarchs want monarchy. How then has it

**Dictionary*, art. "Property."

come about that almost the entire earth is governed by monarchs? Ask the rats who proposed to hang a bell about the neck of the cat.”* But when a correspondent argues that monarchy is the best form of government he answers: “Provided Marcus Aurelius is monarch; for otherwise, what difference does it make to a poor man whether he is devoured by a lion or by a hundred rats?”†

Likewise, he is almost indifferent to nationalities, like a traveled man; he has hardly any patriotism in the usual sense of that word. Patriotism commonly means, he says, that one hates every country but one's own. If a man wishes his country to prosper, but never at the expense of other countries, he is at the same time an intelligent patriot and a citizen of the universe.‡ Like a “good European” he praises England's literature and Prussia's king while France is at war with both England and Prussia. So long as nations make a practice of war, he says, there is not much to choose among them.

For he hates war above all else. “War is the greatest of all crimes; and yet there is no aggressor who does not color his crime with the pretext of justice.”‡ “It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless

**Dictionary*, art. “Fatherland.”

†Correspondence, June 20, 1777.

‡Pellissier, 222.

‡*The Ignorant Philosopher*.

they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets."* He has a terrible "general Reflection on Man," at the end of the article on "Man" in the *Dictionary*:

Twenty years are required to bring man from the state of a plant, in which he exists in the womb of his mother, and from the state of an animal, which is his condition in infancy, to a state in which the maturity of reason begins to make itself felt. Thirty centuries were necessary in which to discover even a little of his structure. An eternity would be required to know anything of his soul. But one moment suffices in which to kill him.

Does he therefore think of revolution as a remedy? No. For first of all, he distrusts the people: "When the people undertake to reason, all is lost."† The great majority is always too busy to perceive the truth until change has made the truth an error; and its intellectual history is merely the replacement of one myth by another. "When an old error is established, politics uses it as a morsel which the people have put into their own mouths, until another superstition comes along to destroy this one, and politics profits from the second error as it did from the first."‡ And then again, inequality is written into the very structure of society, and can hardly be eradicated while men are men and life is a struggle. "Those who say that all men are equal speak the greatest truth

**Dictionary*, art. "War."

†Correspondence, April 1, 1766.

‡*Voltaire's Prose*, p. 15.

if they mean that all men have an equal right to liberty, to the possession of their goods, and to the protection of the laws"; but "equality is at once the most natural and the most chimerical thing in the world: natural when it is limited to rights, unnatural when it attempts to level goods and powers."* "Not all citizens can be equally strong; but they can all be equally free; it is this which the English have won. . . . To be free is to be subject to nothing but the laws."† This was the note of the liberals, of Turgot and Condorcet and Mirabeau and the other followers of Voltaire who hoped to make a peaceful revolution; it could not quite satisfy the oppressed, who called not so much for liberty as for equality, equality even at the cost of liberty; Rousseau, voice of the common man, sensitive to the class distinctions which met him at every turn, demanded a leveling; and when the Revolution fell into the hands of his followers, Marat and Robespierre, equality had its turn, and liberty was guillotined.

Voltaire was sceptical of Utopias to be fashioned by human legislators who would create a brand new world out of their imaginations. Society is a growth in time, not a syllogism in logic; and when the past is put out through the door it comes in at the window. The problem

**Dictionary*, art. "Equality."

†Art. "Government."

is to show precisely by what changes we can diminish misery and injustice in the world in which we actually live.* In the "Historical Eulogy of Reason," Truth, the daughter of Reason, voices her joy at the accession of Louis XVI, and her expectation of great reforms; to which Reason replies: "My daughter, you know well that I too desire these things, and more. But all this requires time and thought. I am always happy when, amid many disappointments, I obtain some of the amelioration I longed for." Yet he too rejoiced when Turgot came to power, and wrote: "We are in the golden age up to our necks!"†—now would come the reforms he had advocated: juries, abolition of the tithe, an exemption of the poor from all taxes, etc. And had he not written that famous letter?—

Everything that I see appears to be throwing broadcast the seed of a revolution which must some day inevitably come, but which I shall not have the pleasure of witnessing. The French always come late to things, but they do come at last. Light extends so from neighbor to neighbor, that there will be a splendid outburst on the first occasion; and then there will be a rare commotion! The young are fortunate; they will see fine things.‡

Yet he did not quite realize what was happening about him; and he never for a moment supposed that in this "splendid outburst" all France would accept enthusiastically the phil-

*Pelliissier, 283.

†In Sainte-Beuve, i. 234.

‡Correspondence, April 2, 1764.

osophy of this queer Jean Jacques Rousseau who, from Geneva and Paris, was thrilling the world with sentimental romances and revolutionary pamphlets. The complex soul of France seemed to have divided itself into these two men, so different and yet so French. Nietzsche speaks of "*la gaya scienza*, the light feet, wit, fire, grace, strong logic, arrogant intellectuality, the dance of the stars"—surely he was thinking of Voltaire! Now beside Voltaire put Rousseau: all heat and fantasy, a man with noble and jejune visions, the idol of *la bourgeoisie gentile-femme*, announcing like Pascal that the heart has its reasons which the head can never understand.

In these two men we see again the old clash between intellect and instinct. Voltaire believed in reason always: "we can, by speech and pen, make men more enlightened and better."* Rousseau had little faith in reason; he desired action; the risks of revolution did not frighten him; he relied on the sentiment of brotherhood to re-unite the social elements scattered by turmoil and the uprooting of ancient habits. Let laws be removed, and men would pass into a reign of equality and justice. When he sent to Voltaire his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, with its arguments against civilization, letters, and science, and for a return to the natural condition as seen in savages and ani-

*Selected Works, 62.

mals, Voltaire replied: "I have received, sir, your new book against the human species, and I thank you for it. . . . No one has ever been so witty as you are in trying to turn us into brutes; to read your book makes one long to go on all fours. As, however, it is now some sixty years since I gave up the practice, I feel that it is unfortunately impossible for me to resume it."* He was chagrined to see Rousseau's passion for savagery continue into the *Social Contract*: "Ah, Monsieur," he writes to M. Bordes, "you see now that Jean Jacques resembles a philosopher as a monkey resembles a man."† He is the "dog of Diogenes gone mad."‡ Yet he attacked the Swiss authorities for burning the book, holding to his famous principle: "I do not agree with a word that you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."‡ And when Rousseau was fleeing from a hundred enemies Voltaire sent him a cordial invitation to come and stay with him at Les Délices. What a spectacle that would have been!

Voltaire was convinced that all this denunciation of civilization was boyish nonsense; that man was incomparably better off under civilization than under savagery; he informs Rousseau that man is by nature a beast of prey, and that civilized society means a chaining of this

*Correspondence, Aug. 30, 1755.

†*Ibid.*, Mar. 1765.

‡In Sainte-Beuve, i. 230.

‡Voltaire in *His Letters*, 65.

beast, a mitigation of his brutality, and the possibility of the development, through social order, of the intellect and its joys. He agrees that things are bad: "A government in which it is permitted a certain class of men to say, 'Let those pay taxes who work; we should not pay, because we do not work,' is no better than a government of Hottentots." Paris has its redeeming features, even amidst its corruption. In "The World as It Goes," Voltaire tells how an angel sent Babouc to report on whether the city of Persepolis should be destroyed; Babouc goes, and is horrified with the vices he discovers; but after a time "he began to grow fond of a city the inhabitants of which were polite, affable and beneficent, though they were fickle, slanderous and vain. He was much afraid that Persepolis would be condemned. He was even afraid to give in his account. This he did, however, in the following manner. He caused a little statue, composed of different metals, of earth and of stones (the most precious and the most vile) to be cast by one of the best founders of the city, and carried it to the angel. 'Wilt thou break,' said he, 'this pretty statue because it is not wholly composed of gold and diamonds?'" The angel resolved to think no more of destroying Persepolis, but to leave "the world as it goes." After all, when one tries to change institutions without hav-

ing changed the nature of men, that unchanged nature will soon resurrect those institutions.

Here was the old vicious circle; men form institutions, and institutions form men; where could change break into this ring? Voltaire and the liberals thought that intellect could break the ring by educating and changing men, slowly and peacefully; Rousseau and the radicals felt that the ring could be broken only by instinctive and passionate action that would break down the old institutions and build, at the dictates of the heart, new ones under which liberty, equality and fraternity would reign. Perhaps the truth lay above the divided camps: that instinct must destroy the old, but that only intellect can build the new. Certainly the seeds of reaction lay fertile in the radicalism of Rousseau: for instinct and sentiment are ultimately loyal to the ancient past which has begotten them, and to which they are stereotyped adaptations: after the catharsis of revolution the needs of the heart would recall supernatural religion and the "good old days" of routine and peace; after Rousseau would come Chateaubriand, and De Staël, and De Maistre, and Kant.

X. DENOUEMENT.

Meanwhile the old "laughing philosopher" was cultivating his garden at Ferney; this "is the best thing we can do on earth." He had asked for a long life: "my fear is that I shall die before I have rendered service";* but surely now he had done his share. The records of his generosity are endless. "Everyone, far or near, claimed his good offices; people consulted him, related the wrongs of which they were the victims, and solicited the help of his pen and his credit."† Poor people guilty of some misdemeanor were his especial care; he would secure a pardon for them and then set them up in some honest occupation, meanwhile watching and counselling them. When a young couple who had robbed him went down on their knees to beg his forgiveness, he knelt to raise them, telling them that his pardon was freely theirs, and that they should kneel only for God's.‡ One of his characteristic undertakings was to bring up, educate, and provide a dowry for the destitute niece of Corneille. "The little good I have done," he said, "is my best work. . . . When I am attacked I fight like a devil; I yield to no one; but at bottom I am a good devil, and I end by laughing.‡

*Correspondence, Aug. 25, 1766.

†Sainte-Beuve, i, 235.

‡Robertson, 71.

‡*Ibid.*, 67.

In 1770 his friends arranged a subscription to have a bust made of him. The rich had to be forbidden to give more than a mite, for thousands asked the honor of contributing. Frederick inquired how much he should give; he was told, "A crown piece, sire, and your name." Voltaire congratulated him on adding to his cultivation of the other sciences this encouragement of anatomy by subscribing for the statue of a skeleton. He demurred to the whole undertaking on the ground that he had no face left to be modeled. "You would hardly guess where it ought to be. My eyes have sunk in three inches; my cheeks are like old parchment; . . . the few teeth I had are gone." To which d'Alembert replied: "Genius . . . has always a countenance which genius, its brother, will easily find."* When his pet, Belle-et-Bonne, kissed him, he said it was "Life kissing Death."

He was now eighty-three; and a longing came over him to see Paris before he died. The doctors advised him not to undertake so arduous a trip; but "if I want to commit a folly," he answered, "nothing will prevent me"; he had lived so long, and worked so hard, that perhaps he felt he had a right to die in his own way, and in that electric Paris from which he had been so long exiled. And so he went, weary mile after weary mile, across France; and when

*Tallentyre, 497.

his coach entered the capital his bones hardly held together. He went at once to the friend of his youth, d'Argental: "I have left off dying to come and see you," he said. The next day his room was stormed by three hundred visitors, who welcomed him as a king; Louis XVI fretted with jealousy. Benjamin Franklin was among the callers, and brought his son for Voltaire's blessing; the old man put his thin hands upon the boy's head and bade him dedicate himself to "God and Liberty."

He was so ill now that a priest came to shrive him. "From whom do you come, M. l'Abbé?" asked Voltaire. "From God Himself," was the answer. "Well, well, sir," said Voltaire; "your credentials?"* The priest went away without his prey. Later Voltaire sent for another abbé, Gautier, to come and hear his confession; Gautier came, but refused Voltaire absolution until he should sign a profession of full faith in Catholic doctrine. Voltaire rebelled; instead, he drew up a statement which he gave to his secretary, Wagner: "I die adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and detesting superstition. (Signed) Voltaire. February 28, 1778."†

Though sick and tottering, he was driven to the Academy, through tumultuous crowds that clambered on his carriage and tore into sou-

*Tallentyre. 535.

†*Ibid.*, 538.

venirs the precious pelisse which Catherine of Russia had given him. "It was one of the historic events of the century. No great captain returning from a prolonged campaign of difficulty and hazard crowned by the most glorious victory, ever received a more splendid and far-resounding greeting."* At the Academy he proposed a revision of the French dictionary; he spoke with youthful fire, and offered to undertake all such part of the work as would come under the letter A. At the close of the sitting he said, "Gentlemen, I thank you in the name of the alphabet." To which the chairman, Chastellux, replied: "And we thank you in the name of letters."

Meanwhile his play, *Irène*, was being performed at the theatre; against the advice of the physicians again, he insisted on attending. The play was poor; but people marveled not so much that a man of eighty-three should write a poor play, but that he should write any play at all;† and they drowned the speech of the players with repeated demonstrations in honor of the author. A stranger, entering, supposed himself to be in a madhouse, and rushed back, frightened, into the street.‡

When the old patriarch of letters went home that evening he was almost reconciled to death.

*Mörley, 262.

†Tallentyre, 525.

‡*Ibid.*, 545.

He knew that he was exhausted now; that he had used to the full that wild and marvelous energy which nature had given to him perhaps more than to any man before him. He struggled as he felt life being torn from him; but death could defeat even Voltaire. The end came on May 30, 1778.

He was refused Christian burial in Paris; but his friends sat him up grimly in a carriage, and got him out of the city by pretending that he was alive. At Scellières they found a priest who understood that rules were not made for geniuses; and the body was buried in holy ground. In 1791 the National Assembly of the triumphant Revolution forced Louis XVI to recall Voltaire's remains to the Panthéon. The dead ashes of the great flame that had been were escorted through Paris by a procession of 100,000 men and women, while 600,000 flanked the streets. On the funeral car were the words: "He gave the human mind a great impetus; he prepared us for freedom." On his tombstone only three words were necessary:

HERE LIES VOLTAIRE.

†

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 378 Maid of Orleans. Samuels.
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 252 Othello. The Moor of Venice.
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 255 King Lear.
 256 Venus and Adonis.
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Music

(Note: In the operatic titles listed below, Mr. von Keler gives short biographical sketches, the story of the opera and helpful criticism of the music, illustrated by excerpts from the score.)

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 66 Crimes of the Borgias. Dumas.
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 33 Brann: Smasher of Sham
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 144 Was Poe Immoral? Whitman.
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 150 Lost Civilizations. Finger.
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 201 Satan and the Saints.
 67 Church History. H. M. Titchenor.
 266 Life of Shakespeare and Analysis of His Plays.
 123 Life of Madame Du Barry.
 139 Life of Dante.
 69 Life of Mary, Queen of Scots. Dumas.
 5 Life of Samuel Johnson. Macaulay.
 174 Trial of William Penn.
 300 Terrorism In France. Dumas.

Humor

- 381 Wit and Wisdom of Dickens. Swasey.

- 382 Humor and Wisdom of
Lincoln. Gunn.
369 Artemus Ward's Travels.
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Artemus Ward.
291 Jumping Frog and Other
Humorous Tales.
Mark Twain.
166 English as She Is Spoke.
Mark Twain.
231 Eight Humorous Sketches.
Mark Twain.
13 Idle Thoughts of an Idle
Fellow. Jerome.
205 Artemus Ward. His Book.
187 Whistler's Hamor.
216 Wit of Heinrich Heine.
Geo. Eliot.
20 Let's Laugh. Nasby.

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Clothes. Smith.
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vian Firmament. Moritzen.
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87 Love, an Essay. Montaigne.
48 Bacon's Essays.
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26 On Going to Church.
G. B. Shaw.



